

Last week I introduced an amendment to the Justice Department Appropriations bill with Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) that would have lifted restrictions that prevent local police from accessing critical information about the guns they confiscate. Using a computerized database containing this gun trace data, agents in the Chicago ATF office were able to determine that more than 300 guns used in gang-related crimes in Chicago were originally bought at only four gun shops in Mississippi. The gun shops were Mega Pawn, Krosstown Trade and Pawn, and the North Delta Gun Shop in Clarksdale, and Route 61 Trade and Pawn in Tunica.

Thanks to the leadership of ATF Special Agent in Charge of the Chicago office Andy Traver, 19 people were arrested in March in connection with this Mississippi-to-Chicago gun smuggling network. But because of a provision in law known as the “Tiahrt Amendment,” the ATF cannot share the data they used to break up this gun running ring with local police. Our amendment would have given local police access to this powerful investigative tool.

There is a growing threat of gang violence in the suburbs. There are more than 3,000 gang members living north of Lake-Cook Road. These smaller police departments do not have the resources the Chicago Police Department has to fight gangs. Giving suburban police access to the ATF trace data can help keep guns off our streets and shut down the interstate trafficking networks.

Unfortunately, Democrats and Republicans who did not see it our way defeated the Kennedy-Kirk Amendment. But we are not done fighting to give suburban police the tools they need to keep guns and gangs out of our community.